

HARVARD SUSTAINABLE MEETING & EVENT GUIDE



HARVARD
Office for Sustainability

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Introduction

This guide was developed by a team of students and staff from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the Harvard Office for Sustainability. The goal is to cultivate a culture of health and sustainability in how we plan campus meetings and events, providing opportunities for staff, students, faculty, and visitors to eat well and stay active while advancing Harvard's sustainability goals. Promoting sustainable diets contributes to food security, human health, animal welfare, natural resource preservation, and climate change mitigation.

You can use the simple steps and tips in this guide to send the message that sustainability is important and that we support the inclusive wellbeing of our community and others around the world, now and in the future.



Food Restrictions & Allergies

1. When planning meals, designing menus, or coordinating functions, it is important to inquire if the guests have any special food restrictions or allergies to consider. The reasons why people choose special diets range from religious practices, ideological beliefs to allergies, special diets and food sensitivities.
2. Event planners can:
 - Offer a variety of menu options including vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, and “Top 9” allergen-free dishes;
 - Clearly label food items with ingredient lists and allergy information;
 - Ask questions about dietary needs or restrictions in event registration forms;
3. Educate staff on dietary needs and safe food handling.

To learn more, please see Harvard Events Management’s “Food Restrictions and Allergies” guide for a basic outline to provide some knowledge into the most common restrictions and allergies.



Accessibility



Providing details about an event in promotional materials can help participants determine what accommodations may be needed. Information that may be helpful to know includes:

- Location
- Wheelchair access
- Availability of assistive listening devices
- Supports for visually impaired participants (points made on PowerPoints or in printed materials should be read aloud)
- Food options (for persons with food allergies and sensitivities)
- When advertising your events, be sure to include a reasonable accommodation statement.

Visit [Harvard's University Disability Services site](#) for guidance on planning accessible meetings and events

Sustainable Meetings: Top 10 Tips

FOOD AND BEVERAGES



1. Showcase plant-based proteins (like beans, lentils, or tofu) paired with vibrant flavors, ideally as the default main dish.
2. Offer drinks without single-serve packaging, such as fruit-infused pitchers of tap or filtered water.
3. Ask caterers to label common allergens, such as nuts, dairy, sesame, and shellfish.
4. Serve whole grains instead of refined grains (for example, brown rice instead of white rice), and ask caterers to cook with healthful oils like canola or extra virgin olive oil.
5. When offering snacks, feature nutritious plant-based items like fresh fruit, hummus with crisp vegetables, and nuts.
6. Coffee and tea (with plant-based milk as an option) after a meal can leave guests satisfied. For a special treat, consider dark chocolate-covered fruit or bite-sized vegan baked goods.

Waste Reduction and Movement & Inclusion

WASTE REDUCTION



7. Whenever possible, choose reusable items. When single-use items are necessary, ask your caterer to use clearly-marked compostable or recyclable serving items.
8. Make sure your meeting room has a “waste station” with identifiable compost, recycling, and trash bins.
9. When appropriate, collect RSVPs to help determine how much food to order. For very large events, pre-arrange food donation with your caterer.

MOVEMENT



10. Periodically break up sitting time with standing, walking, or light stretching. Ensure there are options for all abilities.

FOOD AND BEVERAGES



Food vendors on Harvard University's campus support sustainable meeting recommendations with a range of convenient service and menu selections. These vendors are happy to work collaboratively with you to create unique menus tailored to your guests' tastes.

When planning an event, ask your caterer for help to create a menu that follows this Guide—they are capable of working closely with you to develop an appropriate menu, and can generally accommodate allergies, religious dietary restrictions, or concerns you may have about the food.



GREENER BY DEFAULT

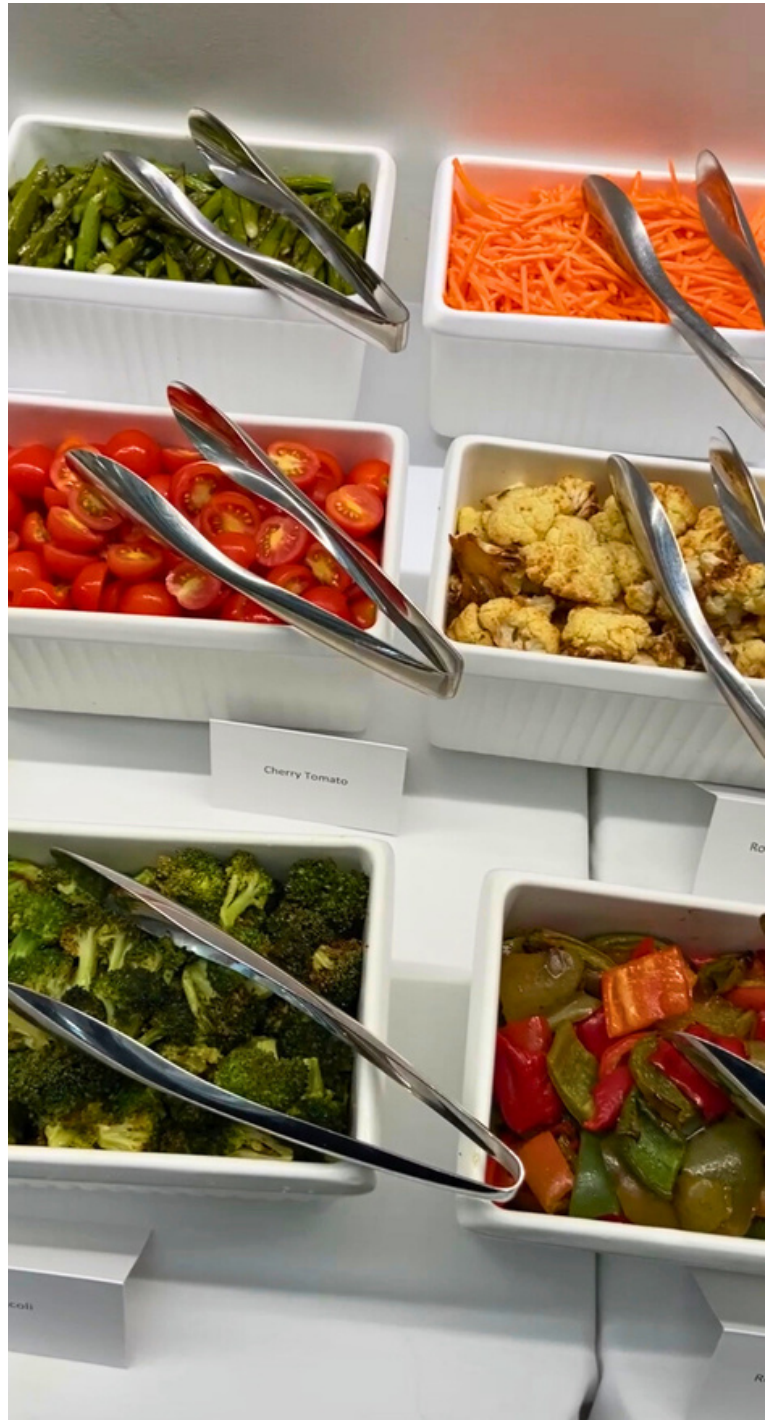


Animal products, especially red meat and dairy, generally have higher environmental impacts compared to plant-based foods. Consider making your next event Greener By Default!

It's simple: Offer plant-based food as the main meal, but let attendees optionally add animal products when they RSVP. For buffet events, serve at least twice as many delicious plant-based dishes compared to meat dishes.

Institutions that have adopted Greener By Default as a formal food policy report significant overall reductions in their consumption of animal products, without restricting diners' options.

For more information and other strategies, visit www.greenerbydefault.com.





BEVERAGES

- To reduce waste, serve pitchers or large carafes of tap water or filtered water. Avoid bottled water when possible.
- Always offer plain water as an option, but also consider infusing some water with refreshing flavor from fresh strawberries or cucumbers.
- Instead of juice, offer naturally sugarless beverages like flavored seltzer and unsweetened iced tea.
- Offer plant-based milk/creamers (preferably unsweetened, like oatmilk) with coffee and tea service.

BREAKFAST FOOD

- Fruit is a healthy, popular breakfast item. Ask caterers to slice fresh fruit or serve as a fruit salad to make it easier to eat.
- Include delicious and satisfying plant-based meals, such as overnight oat cups, steel-cut oatmeal with separate toppings of fruit and nuts, a tofu scramble with vegetables (e.g., bell peppers, onions, spinach, mushrooms, tomatoes), or avocado toast made with whole grain bread.
- If bagels, pastries, or muffins are desired, offer whole grain options and ask caterers to cut them in half.



LUNCH AND DINNER FOOD



- Opt for plant-based proteins (like beans, lentils, or tofu) as the default main dish. If guests request meat, additionally offer poultry or sustainable fish/shellfish (ask caterers to label dishes with shellfish for those with allergies).
- Always provide at least one vegan option and at least one vegetarian option, served early along the buffet line. Ratios and placement can be powerful nudges: if you offer two vegetarian/vegan options and one option with animal products, attendees tend to take more of the vegetarian/vegan items.
- Do not serve red or processed meat, as these typically have the largest negative impact on both climate and human health.
- Offer fruits and/or vegetables every time food is served.
- Always serve whole grains (100% whole grain or whole grain as the first ingredient), instead of refined grains.
- Serve healthier condiments—such as mustard, extra virgin olive oil, and balsamic vinegar—in bottles on the side. Skip the fat-free dressings, as they usually contain more added sugar and salt to make up for lost flavor.
- Offer foods that have been grilled, baked, poached, roasted, braised, or broiled. Ask your caterers to cook with oils rich in polyunsaturated fat, such as canola or avocado oil.
- In buffet lines or self-service, ask your caterers to prepare thoughtfully-sized entrees with appropriately-sized serving utensils and plates.

DESSERT & SNACKS



DESSERT

- Consider whether dessert is really necessary for your meeting, as providing coffee, tea, and water after meals can still leave your guests satisfied.
- If serving dessert, opt for fresh sliced fruit, or a combination of the “three pleasures”: fruit, nuts, and dark chocolate.
 - Suggestions include dark chocolate-covered strawberries, dark-chocolate covered nuts, and make-your-own trail mix with unsalted nuts, dried fruit, and dark chocolate chips. When serving nuts, ensure that they are labeled for those with allergies. For more dessert ideas, [check out the Nutrition Source](#).
- For special occasions where more traditional desserts such as cake, cookies, and brownies are requested, ask caterers to serve them in small, bite-sized portions, and request that these desserts do not contain eggs, dairy, or nuts so that everyone can enjoy them.



SNACKS

- During breaks, consider just offering coffee and tea (with plant-based milk as an option), water, or other unsweetened beverages.
- When offering snacks during a break, serve fresh fruit, vegetables (with or without hummus), and if there are no allergies, lightly salted or unsalted nuts, and/or any other delicious and healthful plant-based items.
- Ask caterers to provide small, reusable plates and/or bowls to minimize food waste.





MOVEMENT DURING CONFERENCES

- For conferences or all-day meetings, support physical activity before, during, and after the work of the day. Consider those with disabilities and ensure there are options for all abilities.
- When facilitating a movement break, include activities that can be performed from either a sitting or standing level depending upon the comfort level of the participant.
- Identify someone to facilitate a short physical activity break(s).
- Try to choose meeting/conference locations where there are interesting destinations within a short distance; provide maps.
- For conferences, try to contract with hotels that have a fitness facility available at no cost to attendees.
- Begin each meeting by informing attendees of which stairwells, elevators, and all-gender restrooms they may use, including any on other floors. Post signs directing people to stairwells outside of meeting rooms and near the elevators.

MOVEMENT IN SMALLER MEETINGS

- Mention to attendees (through announcements or in written materials) that it is fine to move within the meeting space (e.g., standing, stretching). Integrate exercise equipment within the space (exercise balls in place of some chairs, raised tables for standing).
- When possible, encourage comfortable clothes/shoes to support comfort during meetings and/or physical activity during breaks.
- Periodically break up sitting with time for standing, walking, or light stretching. Ensure there are options for all abilities. Other ways to integrate movement include offering a short break, and letting folks know that they are welcome to get out of their seats to move and stretch.
- Implement movement-meetings when possible (e.g., walking meetings); consider those with disabilities and ensure there are options for all abilities.



FOOD SERVICE

- Use reusable, compostable, or recyclable serving items.
 - Ask caterers to use reusable plates, glasses, linens, etc. in place of disposable options.
 - If reusable items are not possible, choose BPI-certified compostable items which contain no fluorinated chemicals.
 - Offer water in pitchers instead of single-use water bottles or plastic cups.
- Reduce food packaging and utensils when serving food. For example:
 - Ask your caterer to serve foods on platters instead of providing boxed lunches.
 - Ask your caterer to provide drinks and condiments (ketchup, mustard, salad dressings, etc.) in bulk instead of individual packages and servings.
 - Consider serving foods that do not need utensils (e.g. sandwiches or wraps, veggies and dips, etc.).
- Reduce food waste by working with your caterer to right-size the menu, prioritize recipes that use all of an ingredient, and ensure excess food can be safely donated.



WASTE REDUCTION



OFFICE SUPPLIES AND GIVEAWAYS

- Provide meeting materials electronically (online or flash drive) to minimize paper usage. For paper needs, use tree-free or recycled/FSC-certified paper.
- Do not use single-use plastic bags or Styrofoam containers.
- Prioritize reusable and/or biodegradable decorations such as strings of lights, potted plants, and cloth banners and garlands, instead of disposables like balloons and items made from polystyrene.
- Ask your caterer to help with sustainable centerpieces, such as potted plants or tiered food stands.
- When giveaway items are necessary, choose items that are useful and actively promote health, such as reusable stainless steel or glass water bottles, potted plants, or reusable tote bags.
 - Ask companies to limit packaging of materials when ordering giveaway items.
 - Consider avoiding candy as a giveaway incentive.

WASTE

- Make sure your meeting room has a "waste station" with clearly-marked compost, recycling, and trash bins (in that order, left-to-right).
 - If you are conducting a zero-waste event, remove or cover all stand-alone trash cans to encourage attendees to use a complete waste station for proper sorting.
 - Contact your building manager, head of facilities, or Recycling & Waste Services to acquire the correct bins.
- Coordinate with your caterer to donate leftover food whenever possible, especially for large events.



